



SUCCESS STORY

Teams Seek Consensus on Development Priorities



OTI/Lebanon

A meeting of the consensus team in Tebnin is attended by community leaders and a field officer from DPNA, CRS's local implementation partner in southern Lebanon.

“The importance of this project is that it is based on the local community needs and priorities...local community members, who are coming from different social and religious backgrounds, participate in the implementation plan.”

—Salma Fawaz, a teacher from Tebnin, Lebanon

March 2008 – With support from the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is working in Lebanese villages to build consensus among different community and religious groups. In four villages in the North and four villages in the South, CRS has been forming “consensus teams” that are reaching out to members of all groups and communities to identify development priorities and draw up strategic plans for each locale.

After three months of work on the six-month activity, there are many examples of positive impact and change. An active consensus team with a focus on involving women's groups has been established in Tebnin, one of the participating villages in the South. Team member Salma Fawaz, a high school teacher and social activist, is coordinating an effort to attract Tebnin's women's groups to the project. Fawaz says, “At the beginning, it was difficult to understand the uniqueness of this project. Usually, other projects give us no more than an implementing role, but this is the first project of its kind where citizens are also involved in the planning and decision making.”

Enabling community members to take ownership of their projects is central to this grant activity, which is led by CRS in partnership with two local nongovernmental organizations: the Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA) in the South and Nahwa al Muwatiniyya (Na'am) in the North. It is hoped that the innovative work in Tebnin – which is composed of a Shiite majority and a Christian minority of about 15 percent and was hard hit by the summer 2006 war – can serve as a model for other villages.

In the next phase of this activity, the consensus teams will receive training in consensus building, interest-based negotiation, and basic conflict resolution techniques. The teams will then conduct polling to identify community needs, organize fairs to highlight proposed ideas, and develop systems to enlist community members in the effort to envision and implement successful community projects.